

## **Renton's Strength comes from its Neighborhoods**

### **Councilmember Rich Zwicker, Renton Reporter**

The City of Renton has a vibrant and dynamic neighborhood program that helps bring residents together to welcome new neighbors, share information and resources, and honor the uniqueness and accomplishments of their neighborhoods. One of the most popular features of the neighborhood program are the neighborhood picnics. Every summer, the city's recognized neighborhoods are eligible for a one-time city-sponsored "kick-off picnic". After that, neighborhoods can apply for matching funds from the city for annual picnics. Neighborhood picnics are held every year between May and mid-September.

The neighborhood picnics are a day of gathering to re-kindle friendships, exchange family news, and have lots of fun and great food. Most importantly, the neighborhood program helps inspire and sustain neighborhood relationships that provide the foundation of civic action, create a strong partnership between the city and its residents, and help enhance the quality of life in Renton's neighborhoods.

I recently completed four years as the President of the North Renton Neighborhood Association, and know firsthand that a recognized neighborhood can really make a difference and help build a stronger and more effective community. We sponsor an annual float in the Renton River Days Parade and have supported other important civic programs, like the city's specialized recreation program and the Salvation Army Renton Rotary Food Bank. But most importantly we have an organized group of involved residents that the city can call upon for guidance in making decisions that impact our neighborhood. We have been able to tackle important issues that affect our neighborhood with a consistent voice.

The neighborhood program was created in 1997 by visionary councilmembers and city staff, including current councilmember Don Persson and Community Services Administrator Terry Higashiyama. It is managed by the Department of Community & Economic Development with Neighborhood Program Coordinator Norma McQuiller, the driving force behind the program.

If you already live in a recognized neighborhood (and there are over 40 of them), take the time to participate by attending your picnic or meeting or by assisting on a volunteer project. If your neighborhood is currently not a recognized neighborhood or you have recently annexed to Renton, contact city staff. Becoming a recognized neighborhood is much easier than you think and staff can assist you every step of the way. There are numerous benefits. Each recognized neighborhood is assigned a city employee to serve as the neighborhood's liaison. Recognized neighborhoods are eligible for grants to help fund neighborhood improvement projects like welcome signs, traffic circles, pocket parks and more. And of course, neighborhoods can enjoy the annual picnic

City councilmembers also welcome invitations to attend your general meetings. It is a great way to get to know your council and have your specific questions answered. I have yet to miss a meeting when I have been invited and I hope to keep it that way!

For more information contact Norma McQuiller at [nmcquiller@ci.renton.wa.us](mailto:nmcquiller@ci.renton.wa.us), 425-430-6595, [www.Renton.Wa.Gov/Living](http://www.Renton.Wa.Gov/Living) or Rich Zwicker at [rzwicker@ci.renton.wa.us](mailto:rzwicker@ci.renton.wa.us), 206-579-8804.